Castlemaine Naturalist

August 2020

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Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Grevillea alpina Kalimna Park
Photo by Euan Moore

New record for Muckleford Forest!

Frances Cincotta

I have been walking regularly for 20 years with a girlfriend near her home in the bushland 5 km north of Newstead. Imagine our surprise to find a daisy bush never before recorded for our Shire! We only noticed it because of the few lilac flower-heads. Otherwise it could be easily mistaken for some other local daisy bushes which it grows amongst - *Cassinia sifton* (Coffee Bush) or *Ozothamnus obcordatus* (Grey Everlasting).

There only seems to be one patch of it covering about a square metre in total and comprising many vertical stems 10-40 cm tall, which makes me wonder if the whole patch could just be one solitary, suckering plant? Andre Messina and Neville Walsh from the Herbarium in Melbourne identified it from my photographs as *Olearia floribunda* (Heath Daisy-bush). They say it's not the normal habit for *O. floribunda* to sucker, but given the right conditions most of the species in this group probably have the capacity to sucker.

We will have to do a new page for the Castlemaine Flora website.

If anyone wants to go find this pretty little plant it is growing on the south side of Bells Lane Track near the intersection with South German Track, under Yellow Gum and Grey Box trees. I have taken cuttings and some have struck already, so hopefully Newstead Natives Nursery will have some for sale by this time next year.

Olearia floribunda (Heath Daisy-bush), from Muckleford Forest near Welshmans Reef
Photo by Frances Cincotta

Next (on-line) CFNC meeting - 7.30 pm Friday 14 August

Platypus Mysteries to be Revealed!

The platypus is one of the world's most amazing animals. This furry, warm-blooded mammal lays soft-shelled eggs like a lizard, uses its bill to navigate underwater, and sorts out arguments with the help of venomous spurs. The platypus is also among the most popular of Australia's animal icons - a great flagship species for freshwater conservation. But what about the platypus's own environmental needs? How is the species faring in the wild? And what needs to be done to ensure that populations survive in our local rivers and creeks?

Castlemaine Fields Naturalists Club has arranged for Geoff Williams from the Australian Platypus Conservancy to share his knowledge of this amazing monotreme via a **Zoom link-up on Friday 14 August (see details for joining this event on the back page)**.

Geoff will highlight the features that make the platypus so special, explain its conservation needs and how to go about helping these animals. He'll then give some hints on how to spot platypus in the wild and outline the possibilities of becoming involved in 'citizen science' programs to monitor local populations.

Exploring the purpose and significance of the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas database

– making your observations count!

Euan Moore

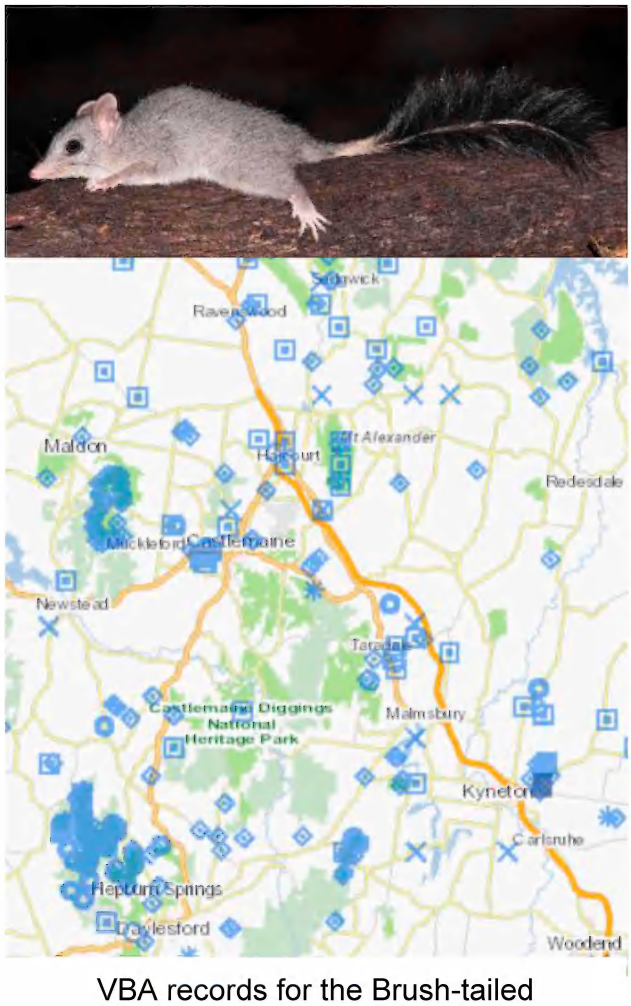
On behalf of the CFNC, I thank Elizabeth Newton for her presentation of the main talk at the July monthly meeting. Elizabeth's subject was the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas (VBA). Elizabeth has been part of a small team that supports and trains people to use the VBA and so was able to impart her extensive knowledge of how it works, its advantages and drawbacks. She is currently working for Trust for Nature.

The VBA is the 'database of record' when it comes to living organisms in Victoria. It is the sole point of reference for government when addressing planning approvals, compliance monitoring, fire and fuel management (including fuel reduction and ecological burns), and advice on biodiversity matters. DELWP also uses the VBA data for modelling, including climate change and threatened species, that feeds into land management. For threatened species, the records are used to guide strategic funding for recovery programs and the like. In effect, from a government viewpoint, if it is not recorded in the VBA it doesn't exist.

All the data in VBA have been subject to a validation process by experts in their respective fields. This means that the data are accurate. Records of important species, e.g. critically endangered species such as Regent Honeyeater, can be followed up with the observer as can records of species outside their normal range or those that may have simply been misidentified. The downside of this process is that it can often take some time from when a record is supplied to VBA until it is visible in queries and reports from VBA.

Data in VBA are from three main sources: historical data from museum and collection records; structured data from formal research projects and surveys e.g. the CFNC Perkins vegetation quadrats; and unstructured data which consist of opportunistic observations made by the wider community. It is the last of these that is most relevant to field naturalists recording observations in the field.

VBA receives data from a number of citizen science databases. VBA Go is a mobile phone interface that allows data entry into VBA directly from your phone. Among the external data providers are Birdata managed by BirdLife Australia, Atlas of Living Australia (ALA) funded by CSIRO and the Australian Government, and iNaturalist funded by National Geographic and the California Academy of the Sciences.



VBA records for the Brush-tailed Phascogale in our region.

Birdata https://birdata.birdlife.org.au/ contains records of bird observations from across Australia. Records are moderated by BirdLife staff and volunteers with Victorian records being passed to VBA every six to nine months. At the time of writing, Victorian Birdata records up to June 2019 are present in VBA.

Atlas of Living Australia https://www.ala.org.au/ is a combined repository of records of living organisms from across Australia. It receives data from many databases, e.g. Birdata, iNaturalist, VBA and other state equivalents, museums, etc; as well as having the ability to transfer Victorian data back to VBA. Data entered directly into ALA are not moderated or checked so caution is needed as some organisms may be incorrectly named.

iNaturalist is a global database which has a local view, iNaturalist Australia https://inaturalist.ala.org.au/ linked to and managed by ALA. iNaturalist allows you to enter photos or audio recordings of flora and fauna which will then have the identification confirmed by the iNaturalist community. Unlike ALA you can enter an observation without having to identify it first, but you must have a photo or sound

recording plus an accurate location (use the GPS on your camera or phone to record the location) for the sighting. Once the iNaturalist community has agreed on the identification, the observation becomes eligible for transfer to VBA and ALA, although it may take some time for the data to flow through.

Because there may be delays in the data transfer process, critical records e.g. threatened species in the path of a proposed burn, should be entered directly into VBA via the website or VBA Go where they will be visible to DELWP staff even if they have not been validated. Entering data directly into VBA will give your data the greatest impact. However, for records where you are unsure of the identification or that are not time-critical e.g. flowers or insects seen on a walk it is best to enter these via iNaturalist where they can be validated before being passed to VBA and ALA.

The VBA is a publicly available database. Data within VBA can be accessed directly via the VBA website or via NatureKit https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/biodiversity/biodiversity-interactive-map NatureKit is an interactive mapping and reporting tool that uses the information in VBA and other sources to display information on biodiversity values, investment prospects, flora and fauna distribution, native vegetation, marine bathymetry and habitat, disturbance and land administration and classification. NatureKit allows you to zoom in and out, pan around the map, identify features, perform queries, generate reports, and create printable pdf maps or images. It is particularly useful for anyone working on submissions or reports on Victoria's environment however, keep in mind that there are delays between the time data are entered on VBA and when they are visible from Naturekit.

The significant delays in data becoming available in VBA regardless of whether they are entered directly into VBA or fed from another database is a major problem and limits the usefulness of the system in spite of its critical role in biodiversity management. These delays are largely the result of inadequate resourcing for such an important database. There needs to be a larger team of identifiers who can verify records in a timely way. There also needs to be a larger technical support team who can work with other groups to make the data transfer between systems seamless. Improvements in this area would be relatively cheap compared to other government expenditure and would result in greatly improved planning and land management across the state.

Elizabeth finished with a demonstration of a search in the VBA database for Ern Perkins' quadrat records and we were pleased to see many there. We are very grateful to Elizabeth for her lucid and valuable presentation that will help us make our field observations count!

Resources:

Searching: NatureKit (http://maps.biodiversity.vic.gov.au/viewer/?viewer=NatureKit)

Data upload: VBA on desktop (https://vba.dse.vic.gov.au/vba/) or VBA Go for incidental observations on a mobile phone (https://vbago.science/about)

Learning resources:

- DELWP VBA site (https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/biodiversity/victorian-biodiversity-atlas)
- User manual

Have your say!

The Victorian Environment Friends Network has alerted us to three important environmental issues that members may wish to respond to:

- **Costs to save Victoria's grasslands escalate**

It has been reported that the failure of the Victorian Government to follow through on the 2010 commitment to acquire and protect Victoria's grasslands may result in large claims for compensation from landowners. In June this year the Victorian Auditor General's Office released its report "Protecting Critically Endangered Grasslands" stating: "*The delays in acquiring these reserves also mean they will likely require a significantly greater investment to restore and retain these ecological values than if they had been purchased within the intended 10-year timeframe.*"

For further information and how you can respond: https://vnpa.org.au/our-critically-endangered-grasslands-need-to-be-protected-before-they-disappear/

- **Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria extended**

This Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry has been extended by 6 months to report by 30 April 2021. The date for submissions has been extended by one month to 31st August 2020. You can read about the Inquiry and make submissions here: https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/epc-lc/inquiry/995 .

- **Review of the Environmental Protection & Biodiversity Conservation Act**

The long awaited review of the EPBC Act confirmed what many environmentalists could see with their own eyes. The review's Interim Report is damning:

"The EPBC Act is ineffective. It is not fit for current or future environmental challenges, such as climate change."

"The EPBC Act has failed to fulfil its objectives as they relate to Indigenous Australians."

" The EPBC Act is duplicative, inefficient and costly for the environment, business and the community."

You can read and download the interim report of the review of the EPBC here: https://epbcactreview.environment.gov.au/resources/interim-report . The report is open for consultation and you can '**Have Your Say' until 17 August here** https://haveyoursay.agriculture.gov.au/epbc-review/survey_tools/comments-on-the-interim-report .

Nigel Harland - Birds of Sutton Grange July 2020

Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	New Holland Honeyeater	Laughing Kookaburra
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	White-browed Scrubwren
Long-billled Corella	Crimson Rosella	Galah
Australian Magpie	Australian Raven	Welcome Swallow
Spotted Pardalote	Striated Pardalote	Superb Fairywren
Red-browed Finch		

White-winged Chough

Nigel Harland

I guess most of you will have seen White-winged Choughs from time to time. Easily mistaken for a Raven at first sight, but then distinguished by their slightly smaller size very distinctive call and a red eye. In flight they have a sizeable white patch on the wing. You will usually find them in family groups – from perhaps 10 individuals up to 20 or even more. They tend to inhabit lower ground, often feeding on the ground, flying up to a few meters when disturbed. They are mud-nest builders, of which there are only two others in Australia, namely the Magpie-lark and Apostlebird.

We often see them around Sutton Grange, but the latest time proved a little unusual. I often walk around our property of six acres and record the birds seen as you will be aware from my "Birds of Sutton Grange" contribution to the Newsletter. Over the past couple of weeks, I have come across a single White-winged Chough every day. Not only that, but it is always in the same place, under a very old Acacia tree. It starts on the ground, but as I walk past it flies up a few meters and seems quite normal, not injured in any sort of way.

This has been going on for a couple of weeks now and I am wondering if anyone else has experienced similar behaviour or could perhaps explain what might be going on.

Nature Notes – August 1942

George Broadway

In "Wild Life" this month (Aug '42) a photo appeared which showed a soldier in the North of Australia plucking a Bustard for the mess. The photo had been released by the Commonwealth Department of Information. It resulted in a flood of letters and phone calls to the magazine asking what was and could be done about it. For many years the Bustard was regarded as eminently suitable for roasting; Bustard shooting was offered as an attraction for visitors to the Northern Territory. Queensland and the Territory were the last to offer the bird protection. They certainly needed it as their numbers had dwindled alarmingly due mainly to predation by dingoes and more recently by foxes and feral cats.

Now to look at the specimens which had been sent in by readers for identification; not so many this month, I suppose there would have been less wild life about at this time of the year.

Insects

Castlemaine (Mrs J Buckley): The large swollen thigh and the long, slender spiked lower leg are characteristic of one group of insects – the grasshoppers. The leg had belonged to a member of the locust group.

Footscray: Your specimen was a mole cricket which lives underground and lives on the roots of plants and other vegetable material. The front legs are designed for digging and each has a little blade like the blade of a pair of secateurs for snipping through roots.

Bowen Vale: One of the enormous stick insects known as Phasmas. Yours was a female which is much larger than the male, being stouter in the body and possessing ample wings. The main flight wings are green, but below the wing cases the shoulders are a glorious rose-pink, one of the most beautiful colours to be found in the insect world. They are entirely vegetarian unlike their cousins the mantises which are carnivorous.

Camberwell: The quaintly-shaped specimens hanging by their tails were the chrysalis of The Cabbage White Butterfly. Destroy them.

St Kilda: The "wog" flying around your sleepout looking treacherous was actually one of the "Good Guys". The three-fold spiky tail has an inner tube which is used to inject eggs into the bodies of its victims which are mostly caterpillars of the "Woolly Bear" group. It is actually an *Ichneumon Fly* although technically it belongs in the wasp family rather than the flies.

Richmond: Your specimen must have strayed into the house with the washing (remember people mostly hung their washing out to dry in those days). It was a Caterpillar of the *Painted Apple moth.* A garden pest.

Glenloth: Like a grasshopper with a long tail, it was a *Long-horned Grasshopper* usually known as a *Tree Cricket.* The tail belongs to the female of the species and is an egg placer. Despite its ferocious appearance it is harmless.

Mafeking: Your specimen was a *Gum Sawfly* that lays its eggs in little cuts in the bark of eucalypts. The eggs hatch into those ugly smelly caterpillars which congregate in clusters on gum trees and wave their heads about as you approach and deter enemies by producing an unpleasant substance. Sometimes called "Spitfires" because they may spit this substance when disturbed.

Thorpdale: Your grubs and beetles are larvae and adults of the *Metallic Blue Beetle* which sometimes occurs in such numbers as to defoliate forest trees.

Brim: *Rhinoceros scarab*, a beetle closely related to the sacred scarabs of Egypt. A scavenger, feeds on dung and forest rubbish. Sometimes enter houses attracted by light.

The Patch: A *Green Water Beetle, Dytiscus,* which is well adapted for swimming although it has to surface periodically in order to breathe.

The Cabbage White Butterfly and the Cabbage Moth are different species.

Tunstall: The Beetle was a large brown Cockchafer, a member of a group of beetles which are destructive of vegetation both in the garden and in the bush.

Ferntree Gully: The March Fly is not confined to March but is about during the hotter weather. The cold months are spent as pupae, any adults caught by cold weather perish. Normally they last only a few months.

Spiders

Panitya: A male trapdoor spider, much smaller than the female. The two little "tails" at the hind end indicate Trapdoor Spider. The male appears to have 10 legs instead

of eight. The extra pair are at the front and are appendages of the last pair of jaws or "pedipalps". (Panitya is almost on the border of S.A.)

Northcote: The large black velvety spider is not a Black Widow but one of the genus *Eriodon*, similar to if not identical to the Mallee Mouse spider. The Black Widow does not occur in Australia but the Redback spider is closely related. (In the same issue was a report on the case of a soldier serving in Northern Australia who had to be hospitalised for some time after being bitten on the thigh by a Redback spider).

Botanical

Camberwell: The creeper was the Milky Kapok Creeper, Moth plant, Cruel Plant, or *Arauja.*

Ecklin: Double mushrooms frequently occur, with the caps joined top to top and the stalk of one left sticking up in the air.

Observations

Euan Moore and Jenny Rolland (15 July) - Christine Kilmartin, President of the Castlemaine Landcare Group, alerted us to an unusual bird call that she had heard persistently coming from the reeds along Forest Creek in Happy Valley, near the site being prepared for this year's plantings.

Spotless Crake showing distinctive red legs and eye and barred white under the tail.

Persistence paid off with two fleeting glimpses and one very poor photo of a Spotless Crake after spending about 45mins listening to it moving about in tall reeds. Based on the calls, there may have been two birds present although only one was seen.

Marilyne Crestias and Bette Mitchell (28 June) (sent in by Euan Moore) - A Brush-tailed Phascogale was seen in the early morning, foraging in trees and on the ground in the Leanganook picnic area, Mt Alexander Regional Park.

Geraldine Harris - Caught in the act!

We continually find golf balls on our property and, as they are always well out of the range of our golf-playing neighbour, we suspect they have been picked up and dropped by birds thinking they were eggs. Recently we suspected some ravens might be taking eggs from a nest we had made for our hens in an old feeding bale in our old shed. Geoff placed a motion camera and caught the offender - a cunning Little Raven! (see photo) The next day I was walking along the creek and came across a broken hen's eggshell on my path - some 300m from the shed - clever Little Raven!

Peter and Rosemary Turner (21 July)

Weebill pair building nest along the Rise & Shine track, about a metre off the ground in a small eucalypt. We stopped when they flew into the tree a few metres in front of us, and watched while bird 1 poked around amongst the leaves. Then bird 2 appeared with what looks like spiders' web to add to the nest. Both then flew off for more material, so we left them to it, planning to return in a week. Pizzey's description* fits: "Nest like baby's wooden bootee with side entrance; of plant-down, leaves, grass and spiders' web; slung among small branches or outer foliage, 1-5 m high". *Pizzey G, Field Guide to the Birds of Australia, Ed. 1, 1980.

Weebill building nest, adding spiders' web

Rose Robin in the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens Nature Reserve

Peter and Rosemary Turner (21 July)

Several flocks of Choughs at the Rise & Shine, calling and flying through the trees. Then towards the end of the trail we heard unusual harsh calls from this group that seemed to be fighting - or play-fighting like some Magpies do. In the second photo, one seems to be on the ground, vanquished under a length of bark! - but they all flew off.

Geraldine Harris - July Observations

Rise and Shine Nature Reserve - Dwarf Greenhoods *Pterostylis nana* flowers and Flame and Hooded Robins.

Barkers Creek - Leaves of Nodding Greenhood *Pterostylis nutans* and Small Gnat Orchid *Cyrtostylis reniformis* appearing.

Yellow-footed Antechinus running down trunk of tree at the back of our house and the next day we watched one climb down the brick work at the front of our house and gather some of the soft grey downy feathers left on the ground earlier that morning where I had removed a dead Eastern Rosella that had flown into our windows.

Four pairs of Red-rumped Parrots feeding on our back lawn.

Sticky Boronia
Boronia anemonifolia
Irishtown
Judy and Phil Hopley

Scented Sundew
Drosera aberrans
Irishtown
Judy and Phil Hopley

Bushy Parrot-pea
Dillwynia ramosissima
Irishtown
Judy and Phil Hopley

Golden Wattle
Acacia pycnantha
Maldon area
Judy and Phil Hopley

Dwarf Rice-flower
Pimelea humilis
Maldon area
Judy and Phil Hopley

Emerald Lip Greenhood
Pterostylis smaragdyna
Kalimna Park
Euan Moore

Common Hovea
Hovea heterophylla
Kalimna Park
Euan Moore

Urn Heath
Melichrus urceolatus
Kalimna Park
Euan Moore

Dwarf Greenhood
Pterostylis nana
Maldon area
Judy and Phil Hopley

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club

COMING EVENTS

Monthly meetings are being held on-line via zoom during the coronavirus pandemic.

If you have registered for our previous sessions, you will be sent the link for registering with Zoom. If you have not joined earlier webinars and wish to attend, please email Peter Turner at munrodsl@iinet.net.au

The main speaker will follow the usual 'observations' session where members can share recent interesting sightings (with an option to show a photo).

Friday Aug 14: GEOFF WILLIAMS (Platypus conservancy) - 'Platypus Mysteries to be revealed!' – See talk introduction on page 2.

Friday Sept 11: LANA AUSTIN (Monash University) - 'Genetic variation in the Eastern Yellow Robin'

Friday Oct 9: GILES DAUBENEY - 'Bhutan journey'

2020 COMMITTEE

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Club website (Webmaster: Ron Wescott) http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/

MEMBERSHIP

Membership forms (available from the CFNC website) can be mailed with cheque to the Treasurer, or completed with details of direct payment into the CFNC account (details on the renewal form), or scanned and mailed or emailed to castlemainefnc@hotmail.com

Subscriptions for 2020
Ordinary membership: Single $35, Family $50
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

NEWSLETTER

Deadline for the September "Castlemaine Naturalist": **28th August**
Email newsletter material to: **newsletter.cfnc@gmail.com**

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